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ABSTRACT

Noting that family structure has an impact on a child's development, this study investigated the relationships among family structure, self-concept, and peer relations with kindergarten children. Interviews were conducted with 154 kindergarten children from 6 different classrooms and from different socio-economic backgrounds. The Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test was utilized to collect self-concept data from each child. Peer popularity was determined by using a peer nomination technique, and family structure information was collected from teachers. Four family structures were identified, but for statistical purposes, they were presented as two categories: "intact" families (families with both birth parents) and "non-intact" families (either families with only one birth parent present or families with other individuals such as grandparents or other relatives present). Results indicated that the majority of children exhibited a positive and consistent self-concept. Responses to three specific items that might be related to family structure were analyzed: acceptance/rejection of the father, happy/unhappy, and dependent/independent. A significant difference between the two family groups was found only on the latter item. Peer popularity ranged from isolated status to very popular. Analysis revealed that family structure did not account for differences in self-concept or peer popularity. The study acknowledges the limitations of the instrument used to measure self-concept and explains the reasons for the choice to use this instrument. Contains 28 references. (BAC)

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Kindergartners from Intact and Non-Intact Families: Some Comparisons

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Kindergartners from Intact and Non-Intact Families: Some Comparisons

The literature contains research that indicates a relationship between family structure and variables such as self-esteem and peer interactions for older children; children from "traditional" families often seem to fare better then their peers from divorced and other "non-traditional" family structures. This analysis investigated the response patterns of kindergarten children to specific items of a measure of self-concept.

One hundred and fifty-four kindergartners responded to the Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Task as part of a larger study. Over half lived in intact families (59.9%), while the remaining 40.1% lived in either one-parent, blended, or other family structures. No difference for overall self-concept score by family structure was found (F (3, 148) = 0.10, $p_{\perp} = .05$).

Responses to three specific items that might be related to family structure were analyzed: acceptance/rejection of the father, happy/unhappy, and dependent/independent. Using chi-square analyses, only one difference between the intact and non-intact group was found. On the dependent/independent item, the real and ideal description of children from intact families were more likely to coincide than for children of non-intact families (X^2 (1, n = 154) = 4.29, $p \leq .05$).

Kindergartners from Intact and Non-Intact Families: Some Comparisons

Family structure is a variable that generates much interest in the areas of child development, family studies, and psychology. Used as an independent variable in a variety of studies, there is still no clear indication of the affects of family structure on the individual. A recent issue of Journal of Marriage and the Family documents the diversity of opinions concerning the impact of divorce on children's development, an area that has been investigated for over thirty years (Allen, 1993; Amato, 1993; Demo, 1993; Jurdeck, 1993).

Bronstein and colleagues suggest that the actual family structure does not affect the child so much as the number of changes in family structure the child undergoes (Bronstein, Clauson, Stoll & Abrams, 1993). Regardless of the outcome on their development, the children in today's early childhood and public education settings are coming into these programs reflecting increasingly diverse family structures (Glick, 1988; Glick, 1989; National Council on Family Relations, 1990). It is imperative that educators be aware of the impact of the family on the child.

Self-concept is generally viewed as the attitudes, feelings, and perceptions that an individual has about himself or herself. Children often behave consistently with the way they perceive themselves (Marshall, 1989). In addition, kindergartners describe themselves largely in terms of activities such as play (Damon & Hart, 1982). Young children's beliefs about their competence also influence the way in which they approach new situations. Their success in new situations affects the way they perceive themselves -- in a seemingly circular

process (March, 1984). Marshall and Weinstein (1984) advocated that classroom structure and teachers' control orientations may influence children's self-concepts as well. Marshall (1989) suggested steps likely to enhance the self-concepts of young children are: 1) Help children feel that they are of value; 2) Help children feel that they are competent; 3) Help children feel that they have some control; 4) Help children learn interpersonal skills; and 5) Become aware of your own expectations for children.

"Despite the thousands of self-concept studies conducted with older students, there has been little research conducted with children younger than 10 years" (Marsh, Crave, & Debus, 1991, p. 377). The importance of self-concept to present and future functioning has, however, been well-documented throughout the literature (Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1983; Harter, 1985; Jensen, 1983; Kostelnik, Stien, & Whiren, 1988; Markus and Wurf, 19887; Parish & Parish, 1983; Swayze, 1980).

The authors of the present study have investigated the relationship among family structure, self-concept, and peer relations with kindergarten children (Grymes & Lawler, 1990; Grymes & Lawler-Prince, 1994; Lawler-Prince & Grymes, 1994). The first set of data (Grymes & Lawler, 1990) examined self-concept and peer status as a function of family structure. The sample included 92 children (50 males, 42 females) from six different kindergarten classrooms in a mid-sized, mid-south city. The Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test (1966) was utilized to collect self-concept data from each child. Peer popularity was determined using a peer-nomination technique, and family structure information was collected from teachers. Results indicated that the majority of the children exhibited a positive and consistent self-concept. Peer popularity ranged from isolate status to

very popular (selected more than 8 times by classmates). Analysis of variance procedures were used to determine differences in either self-concept or peer popularity using family structure as the independent variable. Neither analysis suggested that family structure accounted for a significant amount of the variance (Grymes & Lawler, 1990).

The research of Lawler-Prince and Grymes (1994; and Grymes and Lawler-Prince, 1994) has consistently found no relationship among the variables described above. This has been attributed largely to the kindergarten children's egocentric nature and the changing societal climate. This climate is somewhat less prejudiced toward divorce, single-parent and blended families than in the past, but less "traditional" family types still engender negative responses (Ganong, Colem & Mapes, 1990).

The authors chose to focus on certain aspects of self-concept that are measured by the Woolner instrument. With a larger sample described later, the authors investigated difference in answers to items related to acceptance/rejection of the father, happy/unhappy, and dependent/independent using family structure as the independent variable. There were items that might reflect the children's underlying feelings related to their own family structure. The authors' predictions were that there would be no difference between children from intact and non-intact families on any of the items.

Methods

One hundred and fifty-four kindergarten children were interviewed from kindergarten classes in a mid-sized, mid-south city. All kindergarten children from the district attended a centralized kindergarten center, so a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds was assured.

Teachers and children participated on a voluntary basis. Teachers allowed examiners to come into the classroom and collect self-concept data using the Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test (WPSCPT, Woolner, 1966). The WPSCPT is a series of 20 line drawings, shown in pairs. Children are asked to point to the picture that they feel best depicts them, an then (from the same pair) choose the picture that best represents what they would like to be. The drawing pairs are contrasts, such as dirty/clean, aggressive/non-aggressive, and shares/does not share. Self-concepts score is derived from the match between how the child perceives himself or herself and what the child would ideally like to be. The authors identified high self-concept as an agreement for at least 80% of the items.

At the time the WPSCPT was administered, each child was interviewed using a peer-nomination procedure to determine peer status within classes. The examiners were the second author and a graduate student, both trained in administering the measures.

Family structure information was collected from the teacher. Four family structures were identified for the purposes of the overall study. The child's family structure was identified as being: 1) with both birth parents; 2) with one birth parent (typically single mother, divorced, not remarried); 3) with one birth parent and step-parent; or 4) other (typically grandparents or other relatives). For statistical purposes the last three groups were collapsed into one category. Over half of the children lived in families with both birth parents (59.9%, identified as "intact" families), while the remaining (40.1%) lived in one of the other family types (identified as "non-intact").

Results

No difference for overall self-concept score was found for the two groups ($F(3,148) = 0.10$, $p < .05$). The mean self-concept score for the group was 8.7 (out of a possible 10, sd = 1.84), which was determined to be an overall high self-concept. The breakdown of self-concept scores is shown in Table I.

Insert Table 1 here

Chi-square analysis was used to identify differences between the two groups on the individual WPSCPT items. Only one difference emerged. The real and ideal descriptions of self-concept of children from intact families were more likely to coincide than for children of families of other types on the dependent/independent item (see Table 2.)

Insert Table 2 here

Further analysis of this item was conducted. Chi-square analyses were completed to identify if family structure was related to how children described themselves for both the real and ideal descriptions. No significant difference was identified (See Table 3).

Insert Table 3 here

Discussion

Self-concept is measured by comparing the child's real and ideal descriptions of themselves. Overall, the children in this study tended to have high self-concepts, meaning that their real and ideal descriptions generally coincided, regardless of family structure. The findings of this study agree with earlier results reported by Lawler-Prince and Grymes (Grymes & Lawler, 1990; Grymes & Lawler-Prince, 1994; Lawler-Prince and Grymes, 1994). The positive outcome of self-concept for kindergarten children from intact and non-intact families (when compared to findings from older children) may originate from several sources. Kindergarten children are still largely egocentric and may not notice family structure differences as older children do. Secondly, children in this era are raised in a society that is somewhat more accepting of varied family structures.

One item with a significant difference between groups was the dependent/independent item. While there was no difference in how children in either group described their real selves and ideal selves, children living in intact families were more consistent in describing themselves. Children from intact families who believed they were independent were more likely to want to be independent; children from intact families who believed they were dependent were more likely to want to be dependent. Children from families that might be considered "non-traditional" did not evidence this consistency. The children were more likely to describe themselves (real self) one way but wish to be the opposite (ideal self).

It is possible that the findings could be attributed to the fact that this group of family structures are still often considered non-traditional and the children's responses are reflecting society's attitude toward such family structures. Perhaps the ideas put forth by Bronstein, et

al., (1993) offer a more appropriate explanation. Children who are changing family structures (such as those children in recently divorced and/or recently created blended families) may feel as if their lives are less stable. They may lack a sense of stability and security that children in intact families may have in the present social milieu. Children who lack stability may also have mixed feelings about their own sense of independence and autonomy. Data on changes in family structure were not collected for this study, but should be considered a relevant variable in later research.

Limitations

The authors acknowledge that the Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test is a dated instrument. Measuring such an abstract personality characteristic as self-concept with young children poses problems for the reliability and validity of any instrument. The authors choose the Woolner for several reasons. It is a simple measure that children seem to enjoy completing. It is developed so that the instrument can be somewhat personalized; pictures used reflect both the gender and race of the examinee. That Woolner used the theoretical construct that self-concept is a combination of both the individual's perception of the real and the ideal self also appeals to the authors. Some other instruments rely upon an adult's evaluation of the child's self-concept rather than the child's perceptions of self. Admittedly the Woolner instrument does have limitations; but there is no measure of very young children's self-concept with clearly accepted validity and reliability at this time.

Implications

Analysis of the data continues to support the finding that the overall self-concept of young children does not seem to be related to family structure; however, there may be

components of self-concept that are related to family structure. Certainly the issue of the "family" is broached in most early childhood classrooms. It would seem that teachers are providing activities, information, and experiences that promote acceptance of all family structures and support young children's sense of self.

"Multicultural education" and diversity issues still remain in the forefront of many educators' minds. The purposes of these efforts are to promote acceptance of diversity, promote an understanding of the commonalities of the human race, and to support the development of a positive self-concept for all children. As children come into the school system from more and more diverse family structures, this work must continue. Teachers must strive to promote acceptance of all children within the classroom, regardless of background. Many resources exist that address activities and resources pertinent to this issue (Eg., Bone, Lawler-Prince & Grymes, 1993; Derman-Sparks, 1988; and Neuberger, 1992). Continued implementation of such approaches, activities, and experiences are necessary.

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Table 1
Mean Self-Concept Scores by Family Structure

Family Structure (% of sample)	$\bar{X}$ Self-Concept
Both birth parents (59.9%)	8.78
Single parent (27%)	8.83
Remarried (9.2%)	8.64
Other (3.0%)	8.33

$F = 0.10$, df = 3, 148, $p > .05$

Table 2
Chi-Square Analysis of Individual Self-Concept Items

Accept/Reject Father

	Real/Ideal Self Consistent	Real/Ideal Self Inconsistent	
Intact	**87**	**5**	**observed**
	(86)	(6)	(expected)
Non-intact	**57**	**5**	
	(58)	(4)	

$X^2 = 0.42, p > .05$

Happy/Unhappy

	Real/Ideal Self Consistent	Real/Ideal Self Inconsistent	
Intact	**86**	**6**	**observed**
	(84.8)	(7.2)	(expected)
Non-intact	**56**	**6**	
	(57.2)	(4.8)	

$X^2 = 0.51, p > .05$

Independent/Dependent

	Real/Ideal Self Consistent	Real/Ideal Self Inconsistent	
Intact	**78**	**14**	**observed**
	(72.9)	(19.1)	(expected)
Non-intact	**44**	**18**	
	(49.9)	(12.9)	

$X^2 = 4.29, p \leq .05$

Table 3
Chi-Square Analysis of Independent/Dependent Item

observed
(expected)

	Real Self Dependent	Real Self Independent
Intact	**46** (44.2)	**46** (47.8)
Non-intact	**28** ((29.8)	**34** (32.2)

$X^2 = .35, p > .05$

	Ideal Self Dependent	Ideal Self Independent
Intact	**44** (47.8)	**48** (44.2)
Non-intact	**36** (32.2)	**26** (29.8)

$X^2 = .35, p > .05$